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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003471

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TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS KDEM IZ

SUBJECT: FALLUJAH - DISPLACED SUNNI ARABS RELOCATE TO AL ANBAR'S GATED COMMUNITY

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Al Anbar cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: Sectarian violence has prompted thousands of Sunni-Arabs to relocate to Al Anbar Province. Many have moved to Fallujah given its proximity to Baghdad and lack of Shia militia activity. Fallujah city leaders have taken steps to address the influx. Displaced Sunni-Arabs, especially from Baghdad's mixed neighborhoods, have questioned the Iraqi government's will and coalition's resources to stabilize security in the capital. They want to return to their homes and businesses but fear Shia death squads and ongoing sectarian retribution in Baghdad's most volatile neighborhoods. Notably, IDP numbers in the Fallujah area have recently stabilized. END SUMMARY.

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SUNNI-ARABS EXIT BAGHDAD FOR ANBAR AND FALLUJAH  
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¶3. (C) Beginning in July, Fallujah city leaders flagged to Al Anbar PolOff and Marines the influx of IDPs into the Fallujah area. They said that none would be turned away - and urged the U.S. to direct efforts toward stabilizing Baghdad in order to address the underlying cause of the exodus, rampant sectarianism. Fallujah's city council chairman estimated in July the number of displaced Sunni-Arab families to be in the "thousands." He said all would be admitted into the city, provided they had a resident sponsor and local police approval. NOTE: an IDP camp established in the city post-February 2006 Samarra bombing did not contain newly displaced Sunni-Arabs; instead almost all have been absorbed into existing family members' homes. END NOTE. The International Organization for Migration, which tracks IDP movements, estimates that there are 5,079 families displaced, totaling 30,474 individuals, in Anbar province. Some NGO officials put the displaced figure at 7,000 families. Fallujah leaders said September 12 that some 2,500 families have entered Fallujah proper.

¶4. (C) Al Anbar PolOff spent several days in July and August at a Fallujah-area facility used to process badges for city residents and IDPs. Approximately 50 percent of the assembled Iraqis claimed to be displaced, with a majority from Baghdad alongside others from Basra and a smaller proportion from Ramadi. This percentage held steady across several weeks, according to Marines stationed full-time at the site. Recently, however, the IDP number has stabilized, likely following increased U.S. troop presence in Baghdad.

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IDPS DESCRIBE THREATS; SEEK MORE ACTIVE COALITION ROLE

15. (C) Several Sunni-Arab IDPs told PolOff that militia activity had reached a high point in July, with the Al-Jihad neighborhood attacks in Baghdad. One remarked, "the 23 Sunni families that lived on our street have all left now." An older man added, "We fled Shuala, another sixty families left as well. They checked ID cards, then fliers appeared on our doors. We do not know who are good police or army and which are bad." A displaced resident from Basrah told PolOff that he and his family had lived in southern Iraq their entire lives, but had recently fled: "They killed some of our neighbors and left three bodies on the street. We got the notice on the door. Three-quarters of Sunnis have left Basrah, to Mosul or Fallujah."

16. (C) The IDPs congregated outside Fallujah echoed common themes in many private discussions with PolOff: distrust of ISF in the capital, especially MOI-controlled police units; Shia militia targeting based on identification cards and fliers; and concern about U.S. willingness to intervene in the sectarian fighting. As a group, they comprised "hold-outs" - Sunni Arabs who had stayed in volatile areas for many months. July's al-Jihad neighborhood attacks in Baghdad seemed to be especially unsettling, given the widespread perception that local police had either just watched the attacks or participated in them. Video footage contained on Fallujah mobile phones has been shown to PolOff, which residents claim depicts the graphic beating death of a Sunni imam in Baghdad. Both city leaders and IDPs have said that Fallujah is now considered the safest place in Iraq for Sunni Arabs, given its dominant Sunni population, no militia activity, and 24-hour manned city checkpoints.

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17. (C) COMMENT: The recent increase of coalition troop levels in Baghdad and revised GOI security plan appear to have stemmed the outflow of Sunni-Arab IDPs into Al Anbar. Still, the estimated number of families that relocated due to sectarianism remains in the thousands. Anbaris, for now, appear willing to absorb them into relatives' households. Of note, attack levels against Marines in Fallujah have recently spiked, which could reflect in part the influx of displaced Sunni Arabs into the area.

18. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Al Anbar leaders seek a long-term commitment from Iraqi officials to reverse sectarian infiltration within the ISF. They also support continued visible coalition efforts to mitigate Baghdad violence. Should these steps be successful more long term, IDPs can be expected to leave the province's gated community and return home. Presently, however, most seem inclined to wait and see from Al Anbar Province whether their capital once again becomes neutral territory, especially in Baghdad's familiar mixed neighborhoods.

SPECKHARD